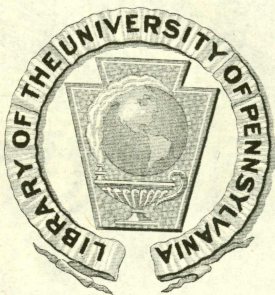


Polish colours
on the
French
front

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THE POLISH COLOURS

ON THE FRENCH FRONT



THE POLISH COLOURS
ON THE FRENCH FRONT

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THE POLISH COLOURS

ON THE FRENCH FRONT

(The Ceremony of June 22nd 1918)

ON June 3rd last, the Prime Ministers of France, Great-Britain and Italy met at Versailles, when they drew up *inter alia* the following declaration :

« The constitution of a united and independent Polish State with free access to the sea is one of the conditions of a just and stable peace and of the predominance of Right in Europe. »

Poland was well aware of the feelings entertained by the Allies regarding her. She had heard a whole series of declarations made, at various dates, by the authorised representatives of the democracies at war with Germanism. She had marked the enthusiasm with which those democracies hailed the manifest of the young Russian revolution bursting the chains of an oppressed country. She had applauded President Wilson's generous programme. But never before had she been privileged to hear a collective, categoric and definite pronouncement. The memorable Versailles document has filled up the gap. Dismembered and enslaved as she is, Poland now knows for a certainty, on official authority, that the Western World has set down her liberation and reconstruction among the aims of the War of Right and among the very elements of an equitable international statute.

To this the Entente made a point of pledging itself at the moment when its armies were about to receive the co-operation of the youthful contingents of the Polish legions. The Versailles declaration formed a concise and magnificent preface to the sacrifices and glory in which these legions were soon to participate, in the hour of the supreme effort of civilisation against their country's hereditary foe. Less than three weeks after the Versailles pronouncement, the first Polish regiments to line up on the Western front were solemnly presented with their standard.

In spite of the terrible sacrifice of blood they were called upon to make in the various belligerent armies, in whose ranks they were fighting in their hundreds of thousands as Russian, Prussian and Austrian subjects, the Poles have decided to constitute in addition a number of independent units to assist in defending the common cause of the free nations. And for the carrying out of this design, their choice fell upon France, a land where every noble cause is assured of a welcome, and which is knit by so many ties to the home of the Piasti and the Jagellons. By a decree dated June 4th 1917 the French Government instituted an autonomous Polish Army, the purpose of which is to fight under the Polish national flag, shoulder to shoulder with the Allied Armies. Within the last twelvemonth, this army has been constituted and organised. It expands continuously by reason of the contingents sent to it from the United States, where a very large colony of Poles have taken up their residence.

The first Polish Division, now complete, has been presented with colours by certain French cities : *Paris, Verdun, Belfort, Nancy*. These pre-

sents, whereby the old-time friendship of France towards Poland finds expression, are in every case symbolical. PARIS, was paying a debt of gratitude, for it remembers that in 1814 a phalanx of Polish heroes contributed to its defence. *Verdun*, the martyr city was desirous of testifying the feelings of brotherhood in sorrow uniting it with the martyred nation. *Belfort* and *Nancy*, the one as representing *Alsace*, the other *Lorraine*, wished to express their sympathy for Poland, the victim, as they have been themselves, of Hun savagery.

On June 22nd 1918, in the war zone, the young army of Poland received its colours. This ceremony followed upon two others of a more simple character. At the Headquarters of the Franco-Polish Military Mission, on June 15th, M. Ambroise Rendu, Vice-Président of the Paris Municipal Council, had handed to the Chairman of the Polish National Committee, M. Roman Dmowski, the colours presented to the 1st Regiment by the great City and the very next day M. Dmowski had repaired to the front for the purpose of transmitting them to the soldiers of that unit.

Early on June 22nd, therefore, in a clearing close to the Champagne battlefields, the soldiers of the young Army were drawn up in motionless array. The President of the Republic presently appeared, attended by M. Stephen Pichon, Minister for Foreign Affairs ; General Archinard, Chief of the Franco-Polish Military Mission ; M. Klobukowski, Commissioner General for Propaganda and the son of one of the combatants of the great insurrection in 1830 ; General Gouraud ; General Vidalon, Assistant Chief of Headquarters Staff ; representatives of the Allied Armies and a number of military and civil authorities. The French High

Commissioner in the United States was represented by a delegate, while other conspicuous figures were the son of the celebrated Polish poet Mickiewicz — an old man with long white hair — and the veterans of the last Polish insurrection in 1863.

A rustic altar, draped about with a tent cloth, bore the image of the Black Virgin of Czerstochowa, of outstanding popularity in Poland. The Colours were presented for the priest to bless them. After a disappearance of 150 years, the white Eagles were seen once more to spread their wings on the crimson squares of silk. It was indeed the awakening of Poland, after a long sleep that was nothing less than one long nightmare. At that sight every heart was stirred.

Mass was held after the blessing of the colours ; and the troops were made to take the oath of fidelity in the following terms :

« I swear before the Almighty God, One in the Holy Trinity, to be faithful to my country Poland, One and Indivisible, and ever ready to lay down my life in the hallowed Cause of her Unification and Liberation. I swear that I will defend my Flag to the last drop of my blood, that I will observe military discipline, obey my chiefs and ever conform my behaviour to the honourable principles of a Polish Soldier. So be it ! »

Then the President of the Republic received the Colours from the hands of M. Roman Dmowski, the very incarnation of Poland in this sacred moment, and entrusted them in the name of France to the care of the Polish Army. Immediately after which, the President of the National Committee delivered the following speech :

Monsieur le President,

The day when the Chief Magistrate of France, the initiator of the Polish Army, came among the soldiers of this army will remain inscribed for ever in its annals.

In the name of that army, in the name of the Polish National Committee, and in the name of my countrymen, I bow respectfully before you and beg to assure you of our gratitude for the memorable decree of June 4th 1917, instituting the Polish Army, as well as for the honour you have seen fit to do us in gracing by your presence this auspicious solemnity.

We see in these manifestations a continued assurance of the friendship uniting France and Poland, a friendship possessed of a long and lofty tradition and marked by the old standing brotherhood in arms of our two nations.

We see it also in this noble deed of the French cities that have presented colours to our Polish regiments : PARIS, the Ville Lumière, the capital not only of France, but of Western Civilisation ; VERDUN and BELFORT, the two mighty citadels, the names of which are invested with undying glory ; NANCY, that beloved city of Lorraine, to which we are closely bound by treasured memories of King Stanislas.

Poland has ever considered that the victory of France will ensure the triumph of her cause, well knowing that her misfortunes are viewed with deep sympathy by the French People.

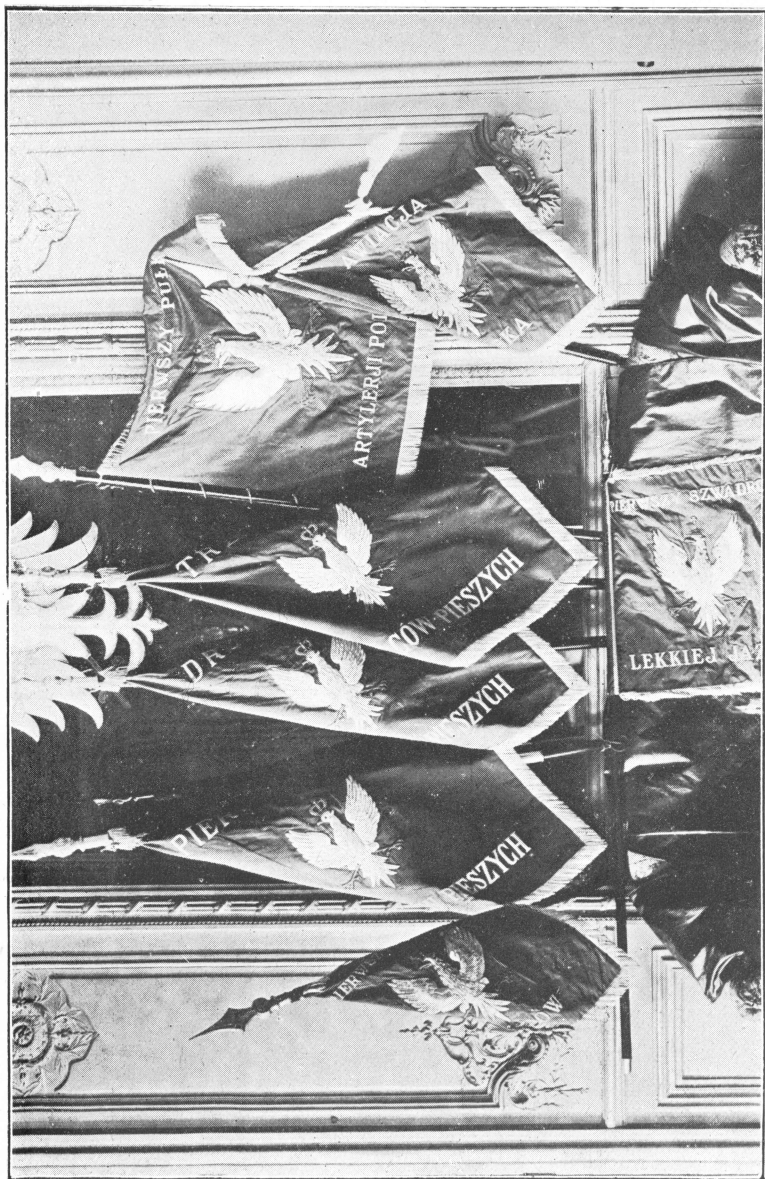
We are firmly convinced that both you, Monsieur le Président and the statesmen who govern France are not oblivious, in your efforts towards

victory and a lasting peace, of the cause of Poland, the most aggrieved of all countries. You have proclaimed before the world, together with the Allies, the place to which we are entitled in the great family of nations. From the earliest days of the war, Poland, who has never become reconciled to her abasement, has directed her every effort towards national unity and independence, and you may rest assured that her most earnest will and desire is to contribute in the measure of her ability to the victory of the Allies, to uphold for the future in close conjunction with France and the rest of the Western nations, a just and lasting peace ; and to work for the progress of that civilisation which is our common inheritance, that our fathers before us diffused throughout Eastern Europe, and in defence of which they shed their blood. »

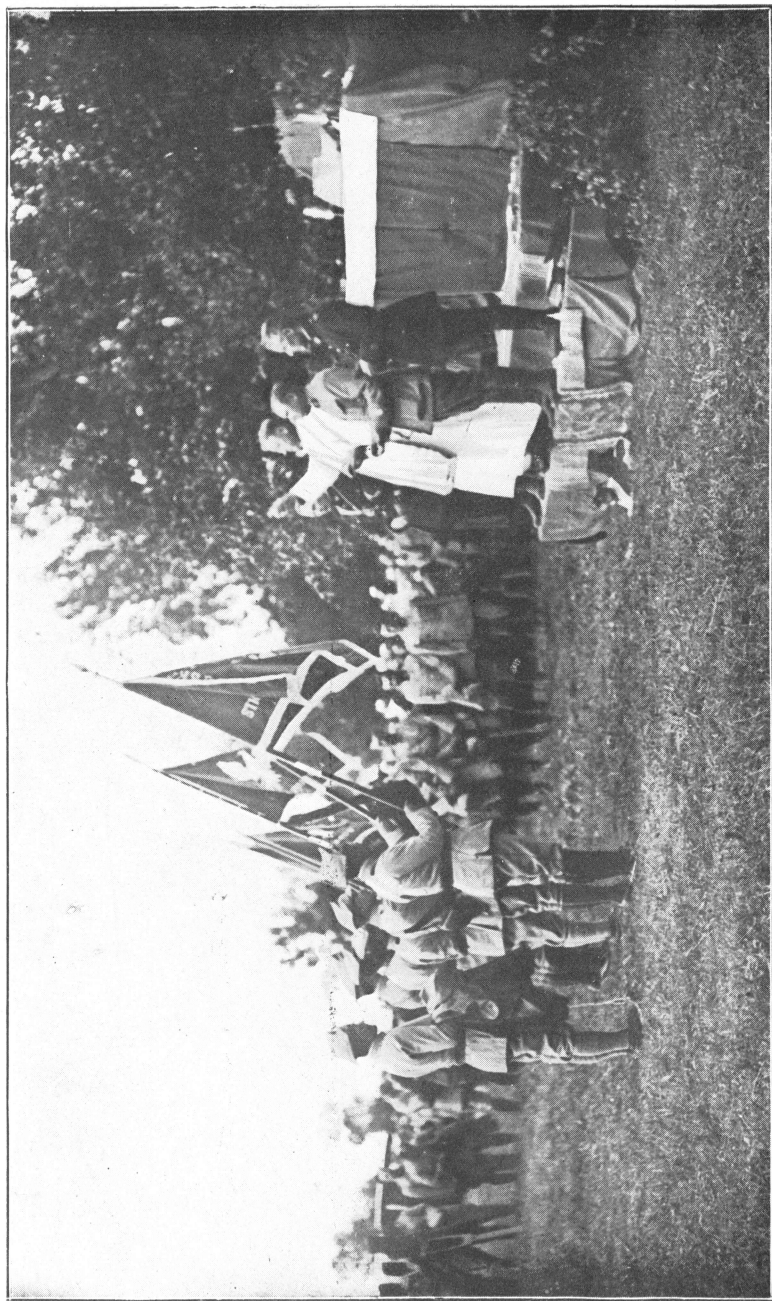
The Chairman of the Polish National Council then addressed the troops :

... « Against whom are you fighting ?

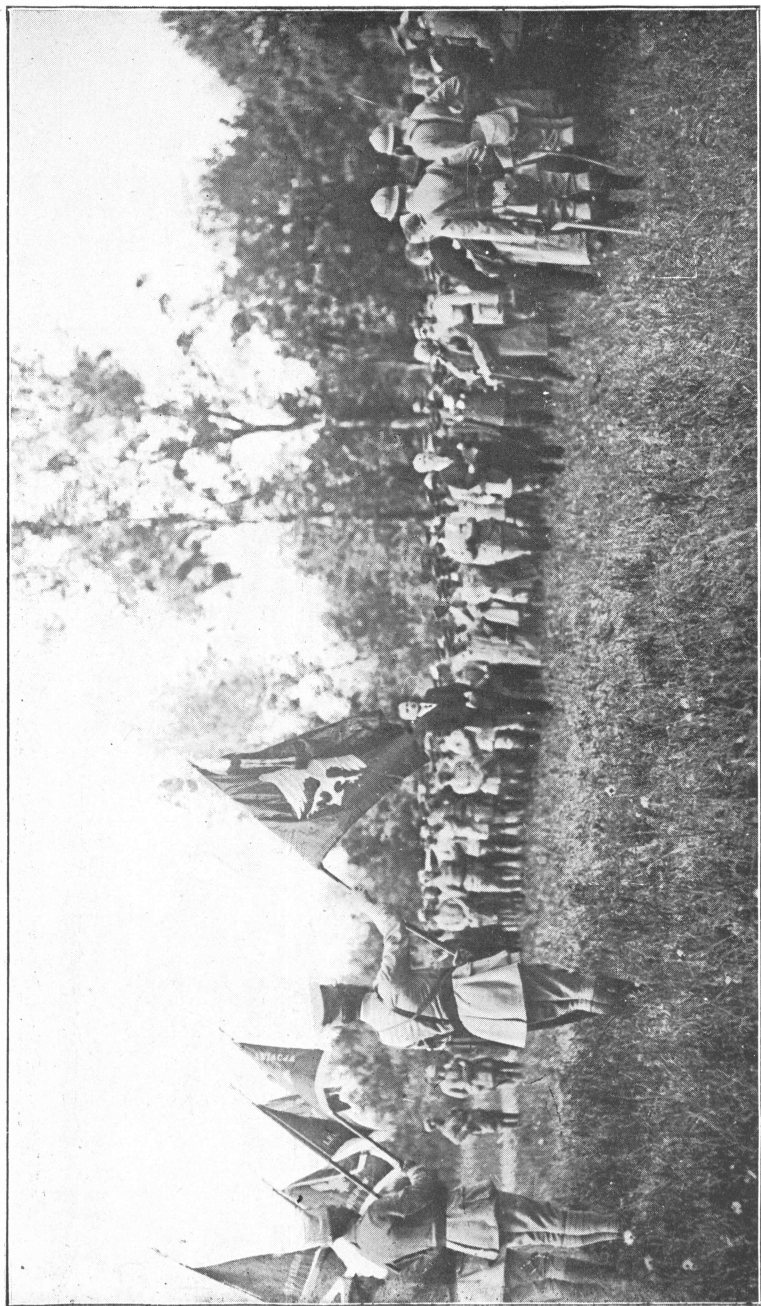
Against those who have parcelled out our country, who have resolved to exterminate, or at least to curtail and impoverish our nation, and to keep us in everlasting bondage. Against the Germans, our eternal enemies, who have wrested from us bit by bit our hallowed land, who have even attempted to rob us of our Polish tongue, who in the days of old conceived and effected the partition of Poland among three Powers and would now bring the whole of our country under their yoke. Against Austria, who finding herself compelled to recognise our national rights to a certain extent, ruled the land by iniquity, by the introduction of political corruption and by merciless exploitation. The third party responsible for the partition of our



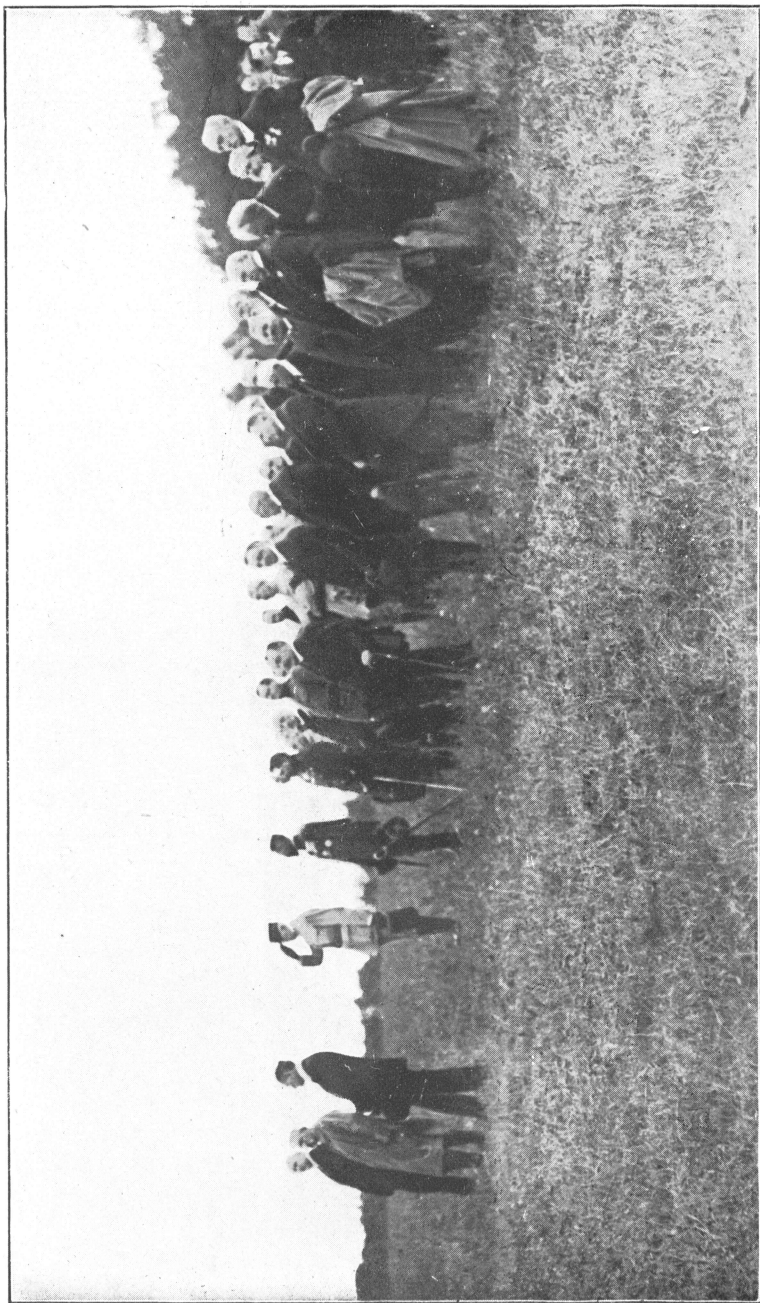
The colours



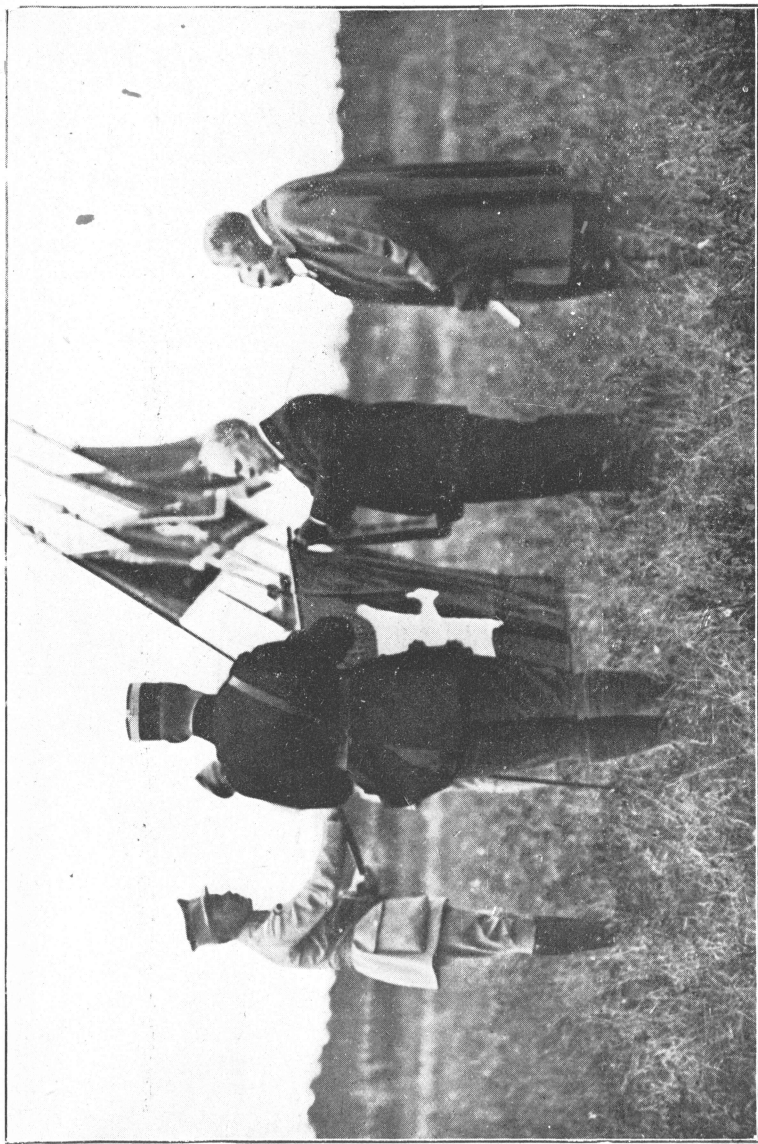
Blessing the colours



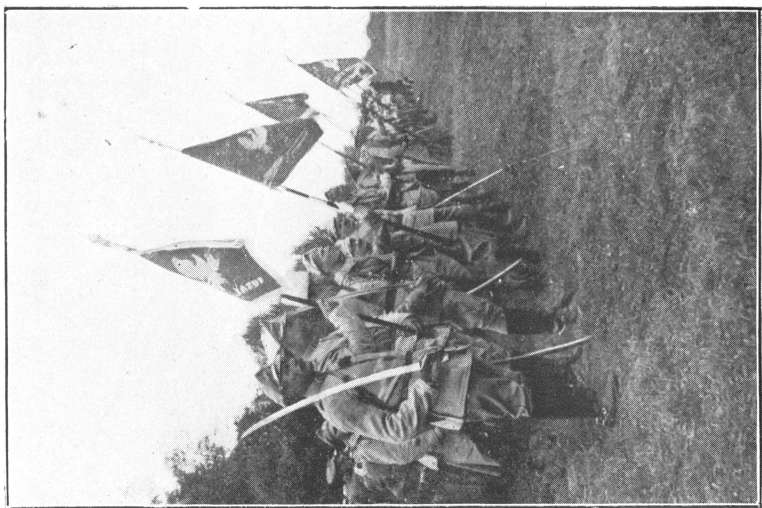
The President of the Republic delivers an address



Mass. In the foreground, the President of the Republic, M. Pichon, General Gouraud



President Poincaré pinning the Croix de Guerre on the pennon of the Company of Polish volunteers



After the presentation of the Colours

native country has already forfeited the Polish territories he held in subjection : reduced to a state of helplessness, he is himself threatened at the moment with German slavery.

And by whose side have you entered into the struggle ?

By the side of people who were never partakers in the iniquities perpetrated against Poland, and to whose victory alone we can look for the salvation of our country. With France, upon whose support we were ever able to rely in our struggle for freedom, and to whom we have been long united by so many bonds of friendship. With England, who has often given proof of her sympathy with our cause and with our struggle for freedom. With Italy, for whom our aspirations are all the more comprehensible in that she herself has not long recovered her unity and freedom. With the great American Republic, to which we are so closely connected by the names of Kosciuszko and Pulaski, and that has extended a hospitable welcome to millions of our countrymen.

The Chief Magistrate of France and the representatives of the great Allied nations and their glorious armies are with us here to-day as proof of their solidarity in our struggle for liberty and to receive our little army into the ranks of the champions of freedom. The French cities of PARIS, VERDUN, BELFORT and NANCY, who have presented you with colours, have thus testified their solidarity in our cause. We, on our part, tender them the assurance that their great cause is our cause and that these words of ours will be translated into deeds..... »

M. Poincaré, President of the French Republic, spoke next. His words wrought a deep impression on all his hearers and in due course on the whole

world. This was not due merely to the lofty terms in which he referred to the annals of Franco-Polish friendship. It was due also to the paramount importance attaching from a political point of view to an address from the highest representative of France.

The speech developing the theme of the terse Versailles declaration was a striking confirmation of the rights of nationalities and particularly of Poland. It was so to speak the charter of the future Polish Republic. The greatest crime in History was stigmatised in the strongest words the mutilated nation has ever heard since its dismemberment :

« Gentlemen,

In the name of France I salute the flags presented to the Polish Army, under the auspices of the National Committee, by the cities of PARIS, NANCY, BELFORT, and VERDUN. Paris, that close upon a century and a half has ever extended a sympathetic welcome to the sons of martyred Poland ; Paris, where Kosciuszko spent the bright years of his youth and the dark years of his decline ; Paris, whence he set out to serve beyond the seas, as aide de camp to Washington and as a brother in arms of Lafayette, in defence of the young American Republic ; Paris, which greeted with rapturous applause the sublime verse of Mickiewicz, gladly opening to him the doors of the College de France and mourning for him as for a son, when he died in Constantinople and was brought back to Cracow to sleep his last sleep by the side of Sobieski and Kosciuszko, and a Marshal of Napoleon's, Joseph Anthony Poniatowski ; — NANCY, which as a mark of the gratitude felt by Lorraine, erected a statue to « Stanislas the Beneficent » in that delightful

Place Royale, decorated by genius of Héré, Guibal and Jean Lamour ; Nancy, which in the *Chapelle de Bon Secours*, built in the image of the Polish shrines, piously preserves the tomb of Catherine Opalinska, the mausoleum of Stanislas and the heart of Marie Leszczinska ; Nancy, whose passing grace is outraged daily by shells and bombs, and which jealously screens from enemy attacks its palaces, fountains and porches, the priceless treasures left to the old capital of Lorraine by the good King of Poland ; — BELFORT, the vigilant warder of our marches, that Germany in vain attempted, in the last war, to surprise and overwhelm and which in the present war she has dared but to defy from afar ; Belfort, whose watchful eye, sweeping the Alsatian plain, has taken sorrowful stock of all the sufferings endured under an alien yoke by two provinces wrested from France, and which could not but view with compassion the long tortures suffered by Poland ; — VERDUN, whose name for ever illustrious will ring eternally in the ears of mankind as a paean of victory and deliverance ; Verdun, which while sacrificing itself for France sacrificed itself at the same time for all oppressed peoples and deserves the gratitude of the world. Presented as they have been by such cities, the Polish colours are indeed worthy of the noble land of whose resurrection they are the heralds and of the fine troops that will take them into battle.

Ye holy emblems that remind us in your fresh newness of the glorious standards of the Piasti and Jagellons, and that call up visions of the heroic ages when the White Eagle proudly spread his wings on the red velvet banners, what crowds of memories you awaken in the minds of Poland and France !

What striking significance you assume in the eyes of all the Allied nations !

To France you recall by a tangible image the indignation that thrilled her from the first at the martyrdom of a nation and the parcelling out of its country ; her long cherished though oftentimes all too ineffective friendship for a sorely harrassed people ; the brotherly welcome extended to so many exiles ; the repeated mingling on the battlefield of French and Polish blood ; the fights fought in common in the ranks of the Grand Army ; in more recent times, similar trials borne side by side during the winter of 1870 ; and now — in the arduous struggles of the present war — so many doughty deeds achieved by Polish volunteers, so many protests brought over to our lines by the peasants of Posnania, weary of their compulsory enrolment in the Prussian army.

To the brave soldiers I see before me, nay to all Poland, you are a yet more powerful and hallowed symbol. You are the living embodiment of the mother country ; you are the past, renewed in the present ; dawn after the night ; freedom after servitude. No longer do the sons of Poland fight under alien banners ; hastening up in their thousands from the continent of America, they will form a separate army, struggling by the side of the Allies not only to attain our common ideal, but a national ideal as well ; days of healthy excitement, days of hope and resurrection. A people that in spite of violence and oppression has preserved intact its individuality and its language, that has remained passionately attached to its traditions, that has never allowed its voice to be stifled nor its claims to sink into oblivion, and whose immortal soul has soared to the noblest heights of literature and art, is setting out on

a new Crusade. Ye colours, may ye be to that people the presentment of immanent Justice, the harbinger of its reconstituted unity and reestablished sovereignty. Revive in the hearts of its children the cruel teachings of exile, the bitter lessons of an inexorable history. Urge them on to the supreme effort.

The entire world has its eyes fixed upon you. How could the destiny of Poland leave it indifferent ? Germany herself feigned an interest in that destiny ; did it not suit her to try and deceive universal public opinion ? But after what has happened to Belgium, Poland knows but too well to-day what German promises are worth. The ambition of a King of Prussia is at the root of her misfortunes. Her territory would fall a prey for ever to the Central Empires, if to these her destinies were to be entrusted. It is vain for those who did not hesitate to tread Right under their feet in Belgium and Alsace-Lorraine, to be constantly calling upon Justice and Liberty. No one will believe them. On the other hand, all captive nationalities : Poles, Czechs, Yugo-Slavs and Italians put their full faith in the victory of our arms. On the very day when he came into this war on the side of the Allies, President Wilson declared that the restoration of the unity of an independent Poland is an essential condition of the future balance of power in Europe. The chiefs of the British, Italian and French Governments, having recently come together at Versailles, took the same stand, declaring that the Polish people, to be able to breathe more freely must be given access to the sea. Solemn declarations these, and such as these proud soldiers are eager to assist the Allies to translate speedily into realities. The whole future of a nation is wrapped in the folds of these Colours.

What Pole, what Frenchman can doubt the morrow ? Not to abandon at the last the cause of Right and Justice, not to betray the will and resolve of the sister nations, has France been fighting foot by foot, for close upon four years, on fields drenched with blood. Not to leave Europe and the whole world under the perpetual threat of German imperialism, of fresh aggressions and deeds of violence is noble-hearted America landing on our shores each day thousands of sturdy young men, impatient to join General Pershing's valiant divisions at the front and in their turn to measure their strength with the enemies of mankind. Well may the White Eagle spread his wings once more. He will soon be seen soaring in the light of an azure sky and in the radiance of victory. »

Having spoken thus, the President of the Republic stepped up the Colours, Among them was one all faded and tattered : the pennon carried by the 300 Polish volunteers who joined the Foreign Legion in 1914 out of love for France and loathing for the common enemy, and whose conduct in the field earned for them the following handsome mention :

« A first class unit, whose devotion and spirit of sacrifice were particularly conspicuous on May 9th 1915, when, placed in the van of the column told off to attack the « White Works », it carried brilliantly positions stubbornly defended by the enemy, and only stopped after reaching its objectives, in spite of heavy losses. »

M. Poincaré pinned the *Croix de Guerre* to the glorious pennon borne by Lieutenant Sobanski, one of the few survivors of this band of heroes. He then kissed the folds of each flag and handed

them successively to the several units. The hands of the colonels trembled as they closed upon the staffs. The eyes of the soldiers blazed, tears ran down many a manly cheek.

The ceremony ended by a review. Infantry, artillery, engineers, cavalry and airmen marched past in perfect order and with magnificent smartness. One and the same patriotic faith breathes in every man of the new Army, which, moreover, has already had occasion to distinguish itself. In the Crusade of the free nations against German militarism it has beaten off many an attack with remarkable dash and bravery.

To morrow, by the side of the Allied Troops who are pursuing the enfranchisement of all the enslaved peoples, the Polish Army, by wresting Poland from her ruthless oppressors, will have deserved well of their country and of mankind.

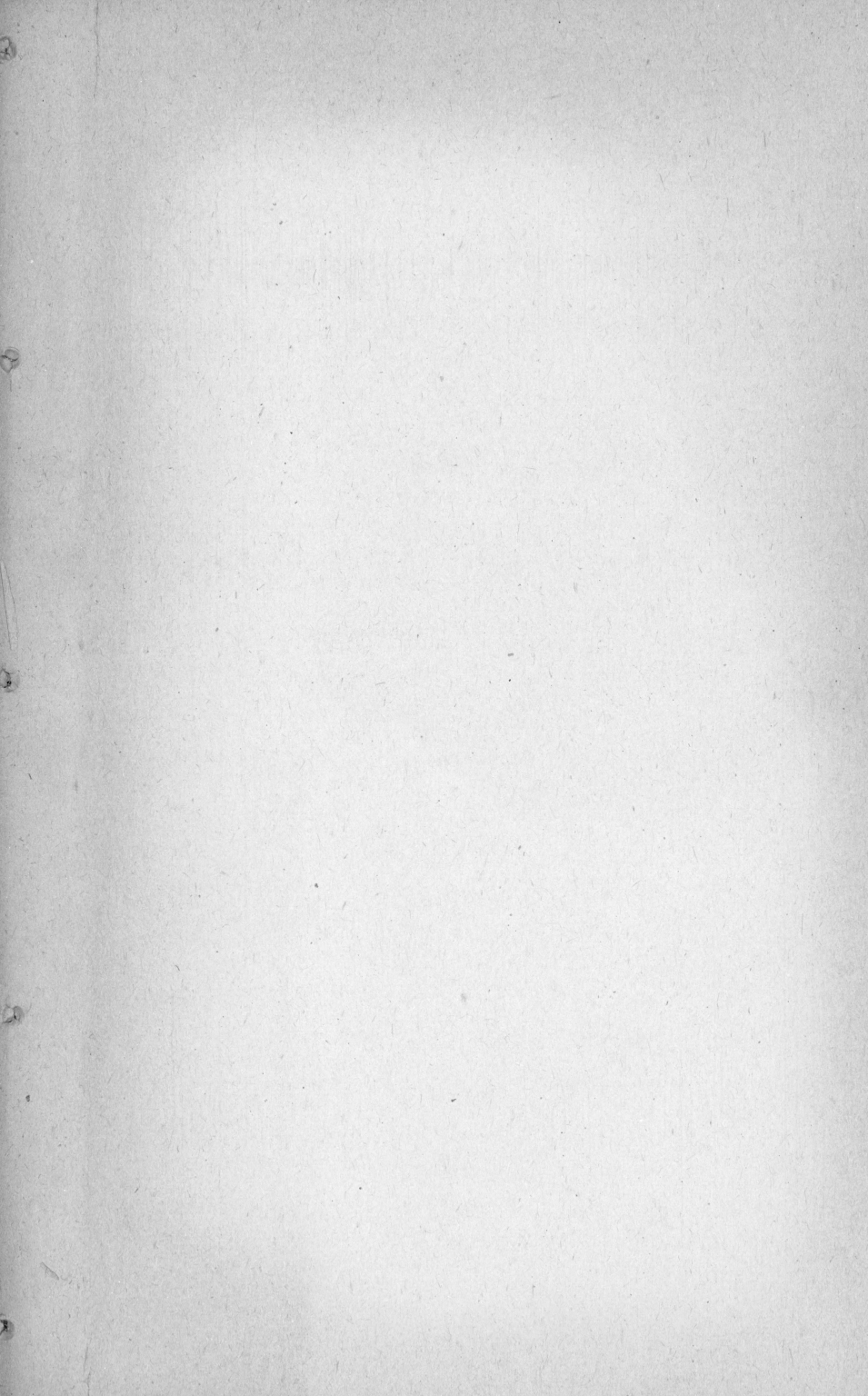


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